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ADMINISTRATION, THEN AND NOW



LECTURES

DELIVERED ON MARCH 2 & 4, 1963

BY

SHRI C. S. VENKATACHAR, I.C.S. (RETD.)  
FORMERLY HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR INDIA IN CANADA



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## ADMINISTRATION, THEN AND NOW

[Text of the two public lectures delivered under the auspices of the Indian Institute of Public Administration on March 2 and 4, 1963, by Shri C.S. Venkatachar, I.C.S. (Retd.), formerly High Commissioner for India in Canada. Shri V.T. Krishnamachari, Member, Rajya Sabha, presided.]

### I

A few months ago Rajaji was asked to give three lectures at the Poona University on Gandhism. He then compared his predicament to that of a Coal-miner who was asked to deliver three lectures on Coal.

An administrator—like Rajaji's imaginary friend—gets confused when he is asked to speak on administration. Most administrators do not think in abstract about administration. They go from job to job diligently performing their allotted tasks. They give little thought to the theory or the science of administration.

The subject of my talk in this series is Administration and not Government. This distinction between Administration and Government defines the scope of my talk. Involuntarily, we mix up in our minds the two terms. We have the subject of Government in our mind when we argue, campaign, dogmatise about the constitutional powers, liberty of the subject, rights of the individual, the essence and seat of sovereignty, powers and prerogatives of the rulers. Government as a subject deals largely with abstract concepts and ideas.

Administration, primarily though not wholly, functions through forms of mechanism and as such it is the most visible form of government, it is as old as government itself.

For centuries, the concept of the State has been changing but not so the mechanism of the State. When we say there is nothing new under the administrative sun, we are only emphasising that there is a continuity in administrative practices while the form of government may keep on changing. It is this continuity which breeds monotony, pedestrianism, conformism; so little heed is paid to administration. Our thoughts are engrossed in the forms of government, in politics, political personalities who make politics and run the government.

Where there is continuity, there is always to be found at any given period in the history of a country, the old and the new

in administration. The task of administration is to utilise, as far as possible, old practices to meet new problems and so adjust them as to make them function effectively. There is not a single duty which once was simple which is not now complex. It is the task of administration to render every duty which is less business-like more business-like.

I do not, therefore, take the view that the Indian administration has changed enormously over the decades nor does it present a study in contrast between any designated past or the present. India has maintained a continuity in administrative forms and practices from the Mauryan times till the present day. Long ago, there emerged the concept of an administering State which laid the foundation on which the structure of the Indian administration has continued to rest, viz. the symmetrical divisions of territory and the orderly gradation of offices.

For the efficient administration of their empire, the Mauryan rulers divided the dominions over which they ruled, into provinces, subdivided into districts. In the Asokan inscriptions there are references to officials charged with the welfare of Janapadas and Pradeshas, mahamatras or higher officers charged with the administration of cities and a host of minor officials including clerks, scribes and reporters.

From the time of the Moghul Emperor—Akbar, India steadily grew as an administering State, in a constant process of formation which has continued right up to 1956, the year of the passing of the States Reorganisation Act. The territorial divisions of the Moghul period—the Sircars, the Subas and the Mahals, were continued by the British in the form of provinces, divisions and districts.

Also from time immemorial, Indian administration has been built round land management, irrigation and relationship with the peasantry. This outline of administration was sharply delineated by the genius of Akbar in his grasp of the idea that a centralised monarchy in order to govern a vast peasant population and to have a sound treasury, needed the office of the local representative. The British rulers gave continuity to this basic fact by recognising that Indian conditions demanded that between the villages and the government at the top, there should be an intermediate structure on which the activities of the government should rest.

Another long and well-established structural feature of Indian administration is the self-governing institution at the village level. Many of the duties which devolved upon States, rulers and centralised bureaucracies were taken over, from the earliest times, by village panchayats. They were freely elected bodies and represented all segments of the village society. They upheld individual rights and preserved intact the internal

economy of the country. These villages were functioning when Metcalfe in 1830 described them as "little republics" in a famous minute. They are now in a revolutionary process of rejuvenation as a part of the process of modernisation of rural life and society.

The present administrative machine has been developed for over a century. The British took over some of the administrative methods of their predecessors and added a few of their own. The secretariat was British in character; the hierarchic officialdom in the lower rungs of the official ladder was Moghul in heritage which can also be recognised in the district administration, in the methods of revenue collection and in the maintenance of records in the local administration.

The machinery of the Central Government which is in operation today was fashioned in the leisurely days of the nineteenth century. Canning set up an Executive Council of the Viceroy on the model of the British Cabinet. The business of Government was distributed among half-a-dozen or more departments. Inter-departmental co-ordination of business was effected by the overall authority of the Viceroy and the *esprit de corps* of the civil servants who manned the administration. Till 1947, the Central Government remained a government by experts. It had but a few masters. Now, it has scores. Where once it followed the whim of one authority, it now follows the views of the nation.

The British not only renovated and refashioned the administration, but contributed certain abstract theories reflecting the English political mind in the nineteenth century. They are still to be found at work in the administration of India. This aspect of the history of Indian administration has been the subject of a scholarly study by Prof. Eric Stokes in his "The English Utilitarians and India". Some of the ideas preached by the utilitarians in the days of Victorian liberalism have now passed into the main stream of Indian administrative thought. We do not care to bother about their origin, because we are so familiar with them in our day-to-day practice.

Prof. Stokes points out that the utilitarians had a number of firm principles for the reorganisation of the judicial and executive arms of the Indian Administration. Their ideas were spearheaded by the English philosopher—Jeremy Bentham. Some of his doctrines have found a permanent resting place in the administration of India.

There was, for example, Bentham's principle of inspectability which also involved an important distinction. It was a distinction by which Bentham in some measure sought to reintroduce the Whig separation of the powers, stripped of its traditional

defects. The distinction he made was between controlling and executive function. It was merely stating in another form the necessity for a disciplined administrative hierarchy. If inspectability were to be achieved, then the work of inspection and control had to be kept entirely separate from that of actual execution.

Bentham's ideal state was therefore envisaged as a hierarchy of individual officials, related to one another in a military form of subordination, with a perfectly clear chain of command and distribution of responsibility. The area of the state was to be divided into a number of districts, sub-districts and smaller districts, each area having an individual head. The unity of design was to be harmonised with the advantages of division of labour. In short, Bentham's principles were: individual agency, personal accountability and a systematic bureaucratic hierarchy.

Prof. Stokes has also pointed out that the dual problem of controlling without impairing the authority of the Governor-General and of drawing the necessary distinction between executive and legislative functions was solved on broadly utilitarian lines. A unified administrative system was to be established with an all-powerful head, the eighteenth-century despot in altered guise; and a degree of control was to be reintroduced by subjecting the measures of the Governor-General to the deliberation of an executive and legislative council.

"Long after the utilitarians had ceased to be a distinctive party (writes Prof. Stokes) and only the vigorous logic of their mentality was remembered, Indian administration was finally made uniform under a system which harmonised a strong executive with the rule of law. In the sixties and seventies of then nineteenth century there eventually emerged a structure which substantially realised James Mill's ideals of Indian Government."

The pre-independence Indian administration had unique features of experiences and traditions—some interesting parallels of which exist in the administrative history of the countries of modern west—more particularly with that of France and Germany than of England and the United States.

The pattern of administrative absolutism which reigned supreme in France till the revolution has a close parallel with the Indian administration in the days of the paternal bureaucracy. The instrument of French absolutism was a functionary known as *intendant* who was an essential element in the local administration of pre-revolutionary France, as the prefect, his successor, has been since Napoleon.

The *intendant* is a new type of a permanent administrator, dependent on the King and his ministers; the skilled and subtle

instrument of an absolutist State. The kingdom of France, under the Grand monarchy was governed by thirty *intendants*. It was the work of Colbert. They had a general control of police, of justice, of finance; they became the local sovereign of municipalities. It was their business, the King wrote, to secure, "the due observance of our edicts, the administration of civil and criminal justice and police and all things else which concern the prosperity and security of our subjects". This system of administrative absolutism crashed under the impact of the Revolution.

The political unity of India had to await the freedom of India. At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was no unity of common administrative tradition or a common body of law. Nor was there any common representative body. A unity which was gradually established was that of a common administration. The Central Government of India was a transcendent administrative unit (with an army at its core) superimposed over provinces with divergent provincial sentiments. Here we may see a parallel with the Germany of the nineteenth century under the aegis of Prussia.

Among those nations who had embarked upon constitution-making and working out democratic and liberal principles, administrative development was a tardy affair. Administrative reforms were brought about after constitution-making was completed. Administrative development in England depended upon a number of factors peculiar to the geography and history of an island country. From the 17th century onwards, administration gave place to constitutional struggle. Parliament became the King; England became a legislative State.

The task of government was entrusted to intelligent amateurs. There was that strong national prejudice that it was unwise to make an expert the minister of State. Government should be managed by political amateurs who should be aided and advised by experts in administration working in unseen partnership with the Minister. So emerged a body of "professionally inspired and politically neutral", civil servants and they have become part of the parliamentary democracy. This was one of the great political inventions of the nineteenth century England.

No country which freed itself from colonial rule after the second world war, possesses the advantages which India has; in its well-tested, highly efficient machinery of administration. The Indian administrative and judicial system developed over a century, continued to supply the daily framework for State action before and after independence. It is fortunate it did not claim parliamentary government as its handiwork. The

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business of manufacturing the constitution was left to the Nationalist leaders. Once they had written into the constitution their political, economic and social aims, they had at their disposal an administration with an institutionalised civil service to carry out the objectives proclaimed in the constitution.

If the structure, form and methods of administration are functioning as they were before independence, what then are the things new in the administration? The things new are the spirit, the outlook and the objectives set before the administration, as a result of the constitutional changes proclaiming the declared objectives of a sovereign people.

For the first time in India, the Constitution distinguishes "Government" from "Administration". For our purpose, the State may be defined as a territorial society (generally in our time a territorial Nation) organised as a legal association under and in virtue of a constitution. In a broad sense, Government is the policy determining branch of the association. Administration is the policy enforcing organ of the Government; its business is to ensure "the daily life of the State and of its sub-divisions by discharging the public services" which both the State and government require.

With the change-over to a parliamentary responsible government the machinery of government, in which the dual aspects of policy and action were not previously distinguished had to be bifurcated so as to enable the function of the bifurcated parts to be exercised through the appropriate organs of government. The division between policy and execution corresponds broadly on one side to thinking and deciding and on the other to acting and seeing that decisions are carried out.

From this followed, the next consequential change—the democratisation of the district administration and of the Secretariat which were the two main component parts of the pre-independence administrative machinery. Before we notice the process of transformation, it may be useful to describe the outlook of the administration on the eve of independence. It gives a perspective to the transformation and changes initiated by the democratic forces.

The district administration could not free itself from the dead weight of the 19th century philosophy of *laissez faire*. As a result, while it carried out the routine task of administration, it had no impulse or zeal to undertake constructive activities, had no sense of purpose; it had stagnated in a state of static existence. It functioned apart from the people whose co-operation it presumed but in practice was withheld.

It had established permanent contact with the villages through subordinate official agencies under the control of the

district administration. Life in the villages was brought under regulation. This only resulted in interfering with the organic life of the villages. A vital spark was missing by which a listless, disorganised, disintegrated village community could be galvanised into a new life with the aid of external stimulus. The district administration was only modern on the debris of the past. The villages had survived because of their neglect. Their revival was beyond the task of the old bureaucracy.

This is understandable. Even before the Kaiser's war, the state of the administrative machinery was such that it would not change by itself nor would it permit others to change. The Raj had come to a halt. Forward it would not go; regress it could not. H.G. Wells sensed this when he wrote in 1911 in his "New Machiavelli" that the British were in India, "like a man who has fallen off a ladder on to the neck of the elephant and does not know what to do or how to get down".

The machinery of central government had attained a blissful state of aloofness, conscious rectitude, confidence in itself but functioned *in vacuo*. The administering state had reached its apotheosis; as a presiding deity it claimed to possess "a mind above individual minds", adjusting and correcting "particularist antinomies in a serene and elevated solitude".

Two of its legacies are a *damnosa hereditas* for the independent government of India. The excessive paper work of the Indian system went beyond the nature of work of bureaucrats—their fussiness for details and the habits imposed by tradition on the civil service of recording every detail. Curzon valiantly fought against too much paper, too much ink in the Indian administration.

The system also led to delay, disinclination to take decisions, except under stress of grave emergency, to prolific writings on obscure subjects; to the worship of precedents, always a deterrent to change; to the asphyxiation of initiative by the prolific and liberal use of the red tape. Like the Raj, the secretariat made nothing happen; at the most it prevented things from happening.

What happened after 1947 to the then administration is the administration now, of Today, gradually assuming the outline of that of Tomorrow.

## II

Local government has always remained strong in India. Political structures of larger units and of empires have invariably been weak. At deep levels of India's universal society which limited the political powers and functions of the rulers, life was

regulated by the laws of Dharma and customs hallowed by im-memorial tradition and practice. The Code of Manu enjoined: "(A King) who knows the sacred laws must enquire into the laws of the Caste, of the districts, of the guilds and of the families."

An Indian scholar has pointed out that the genius of the people for corporate action expressed itself in a variety of self-governing institutions with highly developed constitutions, rules of procedure, and machinery of administration which challenge comparison with modern parliamentary institutions. Reading the election rules of these bodies, the division of villages and districts into electoral units, their rules of debate, and standing orders for the conduct of business and maintenance of order in debate, and their committee system, one might wonder whether many standing orders of the House of Commons and of the London County Council are not derived from the regulation of the ancient local bodies, ecclesiastical councils and village assemblies of India !

This genius for corporate action withered away by the impact of British administration. The Socio-economic structure was completely dislocated; the traditional social equilibrium in the life of the villages was disrupted. The resulting disorders in rural life were institutionalised by the 19th century administration. Any plan of regeneration of the moribund village life on a national scale had to be preceded by the restoration of a new kind of collective and corporate activity in the villages.

If the district administration has to respond to the rapid marchings of an active, alert, politically conscious society, it has to undergo democratisation at the grass roots. Two facets of the district administration are concerned in the process of democratisation. One is the power of active administration exercised through an individual as heretofore—the Collector or the district officer, the agent or the representative of the democratic State Government. The other is the power of the deliberative administration belonging to democratic bodies, comprising both the action to be taken and the advice to be given.

The obvious course is to interlock the existing administrative machinery with the self-governing bodies of the rural societies. The District administration is to be the new apex of a pyramidal structure of self-governing and self-administering village organisations, of circles of villages constituting viable sub-units for supply and services, all these, organised on a democratic basis so as to secure a triple balance between the authority of the State Government; the machinery of the government spread downward from the district to village level and the activity of the deliberative bodies of a democratic society functioning upward from the village unit to the district level.

The problem of democratic organisation of the district administration may be stated in these propositions:

- (a) Under the Constitution, the State is both a welfare and a legislative state. The function of the machinery of administration is to ensure the daily life of the state. For this purpose it has to be co-ordinated with the departmental agencies.
- (b) Bodies or organisations will have to be set up in the villages and between the villages and the district. These structures are the essence of the new organisation; through them the State functions will have to be exercised on a decentralised basis.
- (c) Democratic elective and deliberative bodies will have to function not independently of the administrative machinery but in integration with it.
- (d) The village elective body is the primary unit. Being a small unit it cannot be left in isolation. For specific purposes and activities, for supplies and services, it has to be grouped with contiguous villages to constitute a sizable sub-unit.
- (e) These new development circles will have to take over the fiscal functions and other activities of government.
- (f) Executive authority in a district will be exercised both individually and through democratic bodies.
- (g) The objective of democratic reorganisation is to bring about co-ordination between governmental agencies, by interlocking them with the elective and deliberative bodies from village level upwards.

In all the States, village panchayats are elected on the basis of adult franchise. Legislation has been enacted in most of the States organically linking the village panchayats with the intermediate structure at block level—both in turn are further integrated with the democratic body at the district level. The legislations lay down the functions of these democratic bodies which are in three tiers and of the administrative and technical personnel in relation to these bodies.

Thus revolutionary changes have been introduced in the structure of administration at different levels in the district. A report of the Planning Commission says that the basic aim is to enlist the support of every family in the realisation of the social and economic goals the nation has placed before itself. The central issue facing the district administration, adds the report, is not the relative role of the State and panchayats or of officials and non-officials but the manner in which all agencies working together can bring about widest possible participation

and common endeavour in the making of plans at different levels and in their efficient implementation.

Rightly, it is emphasised that the district level officials should work as a united team. Their relation with the democratic bodies at various levels has been defined in the legislation of the States and the executive instructions issued by State Governments. The keynote is team spirit and co-ordinated functioning of activities.

These are all the mechanics of administration. They, by themselves, do not make the administration democratic. New criteria have to be evolved and impressed upon the officials in the districts.

For example, officials must maintain contact through consultations, inquiries and procedures which enable them to be aware of the state of the mind of the governed. Officials must avoid an arrogant disposition; they should not substitute their opinion, however correct they may be in their answer to a technical problem, to the expressed wishes of a deliberative body, which must be given the opportunity to learn by experience.

Administrative power must be subordinate and submissive in the sense the policies reflect the desires of the people at the village or block level. At all times the attitude of the officials should be friendly to the governed. Above all, the officials as a class must be completely integrated with the community if the spirit of democracy is to permeate administrative processes.

The pre-independence machinery of administration had two major defects. The Indian system of training, conditions of service and the utilisation of personnel led to frequent changes in the composition of the personnel. The procedural side was fixed, well understood and followed. The human element in the administration lacked continuity and functioned in isolation from the people. The ever-changing impersonal personnel gave rise to the second defect of excessive routine work, involving the maintenance of elaborate records, registers, forms, etc.

It is surprising to read in the same Planning Commission report that the old sins of the administration continue to thrive under a professedly democratic garb. Of these, three are prominently listed. One is the officials are frequently transferred, fatally impairing efficiency. The second is the officials do not spend sufficient time among the people. Thirdly, correspondence and paper work in villages, blocks, districts are all time-consuming.

The practical way of curing these and other deficiencies of bureaucratism in administration does not lie in reviving old cries against the past sins of bureaucratic rule or yielding to

mere denunciation and righteous indignation or to make hortatory speeches which ministers are wont to make addressed to officials. We must find positive approaches to the discovery of methods by which the administration is made and kept democratic.

One such positive approach has been indicated in the Planning Commission report itself. It has rightly emphasised that the village production plans are the essential foundation for the success of the Panchayat Raj. The village plan is the starting point for democratic planning and building up of welfare activities in the district. This plan should be prepared after detailed discussions with the people, the panchayats and the co-operatives. The plan is a record of two sets of obligations—one on the part of the governmental agencies for the supplies, services and credit that will be made available by them and the other, on the part of the villagers, regarding the carrying out of their customary obligations in regard to irrigation, afforestation and other community efforts. The village people should fully discuss their obligations which should find a reflection in the village plan.

The agency to assist the village community in the above activity is the village level worker in charge of 1200-1500 families. His work should be fully integrated with the life of the village community. He should reside within the area of his work, move about freely in the villages and function as a joint agent for all developmental activities.

Students of administration have emphasised that excessive centralisation tends to produce some of the commonest diseases of bureaucracy: remoteness, inflexibility, insensitiveness, ignorance of local conditions, procrastination, clumsiness and complacency. A substantial measure of decentralisation, on the other hand, brings administration into line with democratic methods.

The legislation establishing Panchayat Raj institutions provides for elective and deliberative bodies at three levels in a district. There is, therefore, decentralisation of democratic activities. The network of administrative and technical services have to function as a well-knit structure at all levels, fully co-ordinating their activities with the democratic bodies down to the village level. The district administration has to be based on a balance of central impetus and decentralised work. It is not a case of giving a measure of local autonomy with the left hand and imposing control with the right.

The old administrative machinery regulated with efficiency the routine life in the villages but it was wholly mechanistic. Its basic assumption was the district officer should concentrate

on the first four essentials—public order, the swift administration of justice, the prompt payment of taxes, the maintenance of up to date land records—after these came schools, roads, bridges, later on from 1937 rural development. Future progress in the villages, now centres round two vital problems; restoration of collective activity on the part of the village people and the rekindling of the genius of the people for corporate action. These have now become the responsibility of gram sabhas which are expected to play an important part in boosting agricultural production and carrying out the national plans. Planning is the foundation on which the democratic administration in the district now rests.

Nobody should fancy that by enacting legislation for establishing Panchayat Raj in the States, the district administration has been revolutionised and fully democratised in spirit as well as in form. The comfortable assumption that the villagers are there just standing, waiting only to be roused to a democratic way of life should be dismissed if the realities are honestly understood.

The first of these realities is that the administrative mechanism still keeps to its original design of connecting the government with the people for specific purposes, viz. maintenance of peace, administration of taxation, collection of governmental dues, the regulatory functions—the old and the new. It is inhibited by limitations to be transformed into an effective instrument for bringing about social and economic changes on a mass scale.

Surely, leaders more imaginative than civil servants are needed to rouse the villagers from their torpor and inertia. The villager has the same kind of distrust and contempt for the administration as the people of a country have towards a foreigner. This justified distrust extending over generations cannot be lightly ignored. The peasant cannot be expected to put his faith readily in the local officials.

Thirdly, Public Administration today demands a high degree of communication between the governors and the governed. In olden days the citizen's role in a democracy was limited to casting his vote and retire to the background till the return of the next election. Now the active co-operation of the people has to be secured at the administrative level by a stream of two-way communication between the government departments and the public. This great modern need of communication should be worked jointly by the political workers and the officials. Politicians are leaving the job of rousing the dormant peasantry to rural officials whose competency and mastery of the techniques of public relations they question and in whom they repose little confidence.

If democracy is to take root and establish itself in the gram sabhas and panchayat samitis, something more practical than blaming the bureaucracy has to be done. The task of revitalisation of life in the rural areas is most intimidating. It needs an army of dedicated people willing to renounce status and to work along with the peasantry in digging trenches, contour-bunding and labouring for unrewarding desolate activities. This army—a non-military formation—should consist of many able-bodied persons in different walks of life—students, writers, preachers, social workers and so on.

This plea for a nation-wide service is based on another reality—the fact that the Indian society falls into two main groups—the elites and the masses. The elites are the politicians, government servants and other professional people. They isolate themselves in order to guard their prestige as a distinct social group. The elites are distance away from the social order and the mentality prevailing in the villages; to the villager the huge, cumbersome, remotely administered welfare state appears hazy and beyond his ken. This social dichotomy cannot be remedied by attacking that which is imagined to be the cause of it—administrative inefficiency. It will be remedied as and when the traditional society becomes modern and narrows or closes the gap between the elites and the masses.

This is a wider problem of Indian Sociology. In the narrower and specific sphere of administration, some changes may be initiated through recruitment and training of the new class of civil servants.

Recruitment to the higher civil services in India continues to be based on Macaulay's principle of "liberal education". The best graduates in any subject will eventually, it is held, make the best civil servants.

Macaulayan idea is class-restrictive. It takes for granted that the entrants to the civil service must be the "sons of the upper and the middle classes". In the present-day democracy, the civil service in its composition must reflect the representative cross-sections of the whole community. The French after the Second World War have taken a drastic step to make recruitment to administrative class more democratic. Social mobility is one of the developing characteristics of the higher civil service of England and France.

In these countries the role of the civil servant in a welfare state is receiving greater attention. A French authority goes so far as to say that the present-day civil servant is a "social scientist in action". The programme of training in India—at a training Institute as well as 'on the job'—even if it may not match such a description must keep fairly close to it.

The last of the reality is that we are *so far* bogged down in the attempt to pass democracy to the villager. The district administration, on its part, remains anchored to its old moorings, doing diligently its allotted duties but almost nothing judged by the ideological claims of the democratic age.

### III

In contrast to the revolutionary changes in the district administration, the transformations at the national level appear to be prosaically evolutionary. Where there are no serious breaches with the past, the changes seem so humdrum that they almost go unnoticed; yet they embody in them something of vital significance. The place of Civil Service in a parliamentary democracy has not yet made a fuller impact on the contemporary mind. We are in the midst of many changes; they seem to attract little interest or attention.

We take it for granted that by establishing the parliamentary system of democracy in India, we have bodily appropriated all the assets evolved out of the experience of governing under a democratic system. The concept of a modern Civil Service was born in the mid-19th-Century England. They were not understood by the contemporary mind. One may read Anthony Trollope's "Three Clerks", a poor novel on the Civil Service. Trollope ridiculed the Civil Service pharisees and the idea of a competitive examination. He was sublimely unaware of the great changes which were then taking place in English Society under the impetus of democracy in an industrial age.

In retrospect, we see the value of a stable organisation of experienced and competent permanent officials in a society governed under parliamentary democracy. It is impossible to overstress the significance of this modern type of Civil Service which is neither elected from below nor appointed from above. About this H. G. Wells wrote in one place : "Elected, it would be, like the politician, merely a reflection and exploitation of the self-pushing peasant type; appointed, it would be servile to the masterful predatory adventurer."

Many concepts of the Civil Service grew up gradually as a part of the practical working of parliamentary democracy in England. They have become accepted parts of the tradition in a modern Civil Service functioning under a parliamentary system. It appears on a first look that the essential characteristics of the Civil Service seem to have a timelessness in a rapidly changing world.

It is not so. A Civil Service will not degenerate into a bureaucracy as long as it is capable of changing, is resilient

and adjusts itself to the changing needs of society. We see fundamental changes have taken place *within* the modern Civil Service. The first of these is the role of the Civil Servant in the changing conception of the state, from one of regulation to that of promoting social welfare. Secondly, the class composition of the Civil Service has become more broadbased. There is no longer an oligarchic group of elites. A nation-wide class of servants, in which the higher Civil Servants work with economists, scientists, technocrats and the new managerial class has come into being. The Civil Service has acquired a much wider structure and a widening horizon.

On the other hand, the Civil Service under a parliamentary system in the newly independent countries faces danger from certain forces *without*. It has been pointed out that the earlier role of the Civil Service was that of a non-competitive neutral group in a capitalistic system, and as such it had a steady influence upon the rest of the national economy. The Civil Service of today cannot play that kind of a static role. The choice is between a free and a servile society. What is at stake is the survival of democracy itself in a form adopted to the genius of the people.

Consequently, the Civil Service now is part of the built-in structure in a democratic framework. As such it maintains a dividing line between a servile state and a democratic state based on freedom. In this respect the role of the Civil Service is a positive one. In a developing democracy, the Civil Service is a balancing factor for throughout history it has been demonstrated that democratic governments have a tendency to get distorted and corrupted.

In 1947, the Civil Service at the national and state level passed under effective political control of the Ministers and the Cabinet. This does not automatically happen merely because of the parliamentary system. In England political reform preceded Civil Service reform; the democratic government was stronger than the Civil Service. In India the nationalist leaders who took over power set up a powerful political government which derived its power from the constitution, from the organised party system and from the close affinity between the legislature and the political executive. For a newly independent country, the Indian situation was unique.

Overnight, the old government by experts was replaced by a government which is a combination of the amateur administrator and the trained Civil Servant. To start with the new rulers were not unduly impressed with this idea of common enterprise or partnership between the two elements in a Cabinet System of government. They needed as many men

of special skills as they could get. So the trained and available manpower had to be used but just tolerated. No doubt the Civil Servants were comparatively well-paid, worked in decent material conditions. At the same time, they were distrusted at higher level; at district level they were clumsily supervised by partymen of "orthodox ideological quality, but small technical knowledge". The expanding nature of the functions of government made the Civil Servants more valuable than ever as specialists and sometimes as scapegoats. Partymen preferred the Civil Servants in the latter role but the ministers engaged in 'the endless adventure of governing men', were disposed to show tolerant consideration to them.

What is the nature of the relation between the Minister and his officials ? Surprisingly little has been written on the subject which is really one for the student of politics, though it impinges on the work of the Civil Servant. Decisions emerge as a result of the policies which are decided by the Minister. Whether those decisions are right and proper is partly the responsibility of the Civil Servant whose duty it is to marshal all available facts and put them before the Minister for his consideration. Advice or consultation precedes a decision and action follows a policy decision. Throughout these processes, the Civil Servant and the Minister are concerned and work together.

One of the lesser known aspects of government is the relationship between the Minister and the Civil Servant. It is said that the functions of the Civil Servant and the Minister meet when policy has to be decided and action is to follow as a result of policy decision. This distinction again is not clear to the general public, in whose eyes a postman or a magistrate is as much part of government as a Cabinet Minister. The close relationship between the Minister and the Civil Servant has been emphasised by that paradoxical description of Prof. Wheare that the form of government in England is a parliamentary bureaucracy.

The constitutional theory of relationship between the Minister and the Civil Servant is that the Civil Servant has no personality of his own; he is merely the instrument of the Minister holding office for the time being. Once policy has been decided, it should be put into effect by the Civil Servant. It is open to the Minister to override the professional advice of the Civil Servant; the Minister does so on his own responsibility.

That, at any rate, is the theory. The public is scarcely aware of the working of the machinery of government and how the influence of departments of government and the men who

man them pervade the activities of the whole range of government and hence every aspect of the daily life of the citizen.

The relation between the Civil Servant and the Minister is nowhere defined. It is left to convention, understanding and practice evolved in a working relationship. Thus there is enough room for different interpretations. Dr. Paul Appleby in a report on Indian Administration says :

“It is fair to say, I think, that in all governments having systematic Civil Services, the greatest emphasis is still on keeping politics out of the Civil Service and out of administration. The invocation of political neutrality tended to be made to appear to extend to programme neutrality.”

The misconception here is clear. A Civil Servant is not a neutralist in thought, deed, or action. He is a trained official whose services are at the disposal of every government, whatever be its political complexion; it is his duty to carry out the programme and policy of the government of the day. Lord Attlee with his experience of the position of the Civil Service in British parliamentary democracy wrote some years ago in an article in the “Political Quarterly” that “the first thing a Minister finds on entering office is that he can depend absolutely on the loyalty of his staff, and on leaving office he will be seldom be able to say what the private political views of even those with whom he has worked more closely are”. Dealing with the question of the relation between the Civil Servant and the Minister, Lord Attlee says :

“After a reasonable period, of discussion, he (the Minister) will say ‘well, this is my policy and I do not want to argue it any more. Now let us consider how best to implement.’ He will then find the Civil Servant doing his utmost to help and throw himself into the work with enthusiasm.”

For long, the Indian administration has worshipped files, rules, regulations and codes. It is time attention was paid to the evolution of some form of Creed, not based on any administrative dogma but as a result of the working of parliamentary democracy. The working relationship comes into play while transacting government work by oral, written or personal discussions. The Civil Servant is expected to be loyal to the Minister and to bring to bear on his work the ethical characteristics of personal integrity and official truthfulness with which goes official candour. The Minister should trust his officers and should not look for “Yesmen” among them. The Minister should not forget that like himself, the Civil Servant is linked with parliamentary democracy. At every stage of his

duties, the Civil Servant is responsible to his Minister. In that relationship, the Civil Servant is not a colourless, neutral automaton mechanically obeying orders. Such a type will only exist in a politically servile society.

On his part the Civil Servant will do well to follow what Talleyrand told his officials : "Don't get carried away by enthusiasm or antipathies and don't espouse causes. Preserve a calm and clear judgment." There is in administration what is known as "Departmental philosophy". It is part of the experience of an officer to look upon his department not as an exclusive world but as part of a larger world of government and the life of the community. This widening experience confirms in him a certain way of looking at things of life and a habit of mind. These and such other influences crystallise into departmental experience. It is the duty of the Civil Servant to give the Minister the essentials of the departmental experience and in the words of Lord Bridges 'to let the waves of practical philosophy wash against ideas put forward by his Ministerial Master'.

Suggestions are frequently made that permanent officials, operating behind the scenes, manipulate the Ministers to be mere puppets. Such a suggestion hampers good relations between the Minister and the Civil Servant. The range of governmental activity has immensely expanded. Even with great industry and zeal, a Minister would not be able to see a mass of detail which are disposed of in a department. The mills in a department, like the mills of gods, grind slowly, only a tiny proportion of the mass, would embody some principle or decision of importance taken by higher officials. Many of them are generally covered by a policy previously determined either by the Minister or by the government. Therefore, it is essential that the higher Civil Servants must clearly know the mind of the Minister so that in the application of the policies to the details of administration, the latter may confirm to the Ministerial policy or view. Hence the need for complete co-operation between the Civil Servant and the Minister and confidence in the Civil Service.

The central theme is consultation, is the heart of democracy, which in essence is a government by advice. In the working of the government, the Minister and the Civil Servant consult and work together. While a politician either is or hopes to be a statesman, the Civil Servant, if he is to play his part in assisting democracy to work and his Minister to be a Statesman, should himself be a "Statesman in disguise".

In a Cabinet system of government, there are three principal participants—Ministers, Parliament and Civil Servants.

All these remarks about the relation between the Ministers and Civil Servants may seem commonplace, pedestrian, platitudinous, old-fashioned in relation to the dynamism of mass politics. Every modern government, whatever may be its political complexion, needs a strong executive to carry out its immense tasks. In a democratic structure, the political and administrative elements have recognised relative positions. It is obvious that though bureaucracies are needed, the bureaucrat cannot have a leading position. Ministers direct bureaucracies but the relation between the two cannot be relegated to the simple proposition that the Civil Servant is a subordinate of the Minister.

The relative positions of the political and administrative elements is determined by the strength and stability of the political executive. In France, before the advent of the Gaullist regime, the Ministers' position was exceptionally weak on account of the irresponsibility of the legislature. One of the consequences was the strengthening of the position of the Civil Service but in the French system there are other bodies to control the arbitrary power of the Civil Service. Nearer home, in Pakistan, the Civil Service has acquired power owing to the weakness of the democratic elements. A stable political executive is essential in the interest of the Civil Service itself as well as of good administration, for then alone can the Services play an important part in carrying out the will of the government.

If rightly, according to democratic practice, no leadership should rest with the Civil Service, then regard should be paid to two propositions. Within the accepted conventions of democracy, there must be some scope for the Civil Servant to exercise initiative. It is not that he is free to do what he wills. Nor should the Minister abdicate his responsibility. In the long run that which matters for efficient administration is the individuality of the Civil Servant and the opportunities he has to exercise some measure of responsibility in any task assigned to him.

In fact this has a bearing on the next proposition which may be termed the doctrine of conformism. The theory is that the Minister has got the last say and it is the business of the Civil Servant to conform to the ideas of the Minister. As a general proposition, there can be no questioning of this. But if a Civil Servant has to be effective, he must be allowed to articulate definite views; if he has no views at all or if he has views which he does not put forward, he will be an 'Yesman' throughout his official life. If he is a man of strong views, he can resist once or twice but he cannot all the time be quarrelling with his Minister; the Civil Servant then has to make an exit. The doctrine of conformity is bound to cause strain in the

democratic processes, but working experience will keep it within bounds.

I have dealt at some length on these general considerations concerning the relation of politics to administration, because they are basic to the functioning of democracy. There is no problem of administration which an open society cannot solve. As Barbara Ward says "it may well prove India's strength that its political constitution, is admirably designed to work out a fluctuating consensus". If any policy is radical in its implications, then administration has to be geared up to implement it. The Civil Service after independence, is handling problems with which the old I.C.S. was unfamiliar—such as international trade, control of vast industrial concerns, management of Banking, Finance, Insurance, etc. It is doing these new jobs under political control, functioning as the instruments of national policies. The main thing is that politics should keep up the play of democratic consensus; administration on its part will strengthen the forces arrayed against any preference for the forced consent of totalitarianism and any weakening of the hold on the habit of freedom on men and women. No doubt there will be much stress and strain but they are all in the game of democratic change and progress.

Reverting back to where we started, what then, is the distinction between the old and the new in administration? Long ago Walter Bagehot depicted the difference between the old and the new in administration, graphically and whimsically, in these words:

"In early times, when a despot wishes to govern a distant province, he sends down a satrap on a grand horse, and other people on little horses; and very little is heard of the satrap again unless he sends back some of the little people to tell what he has been doing. No great labour of superintendence is possible. Common rumour and casual report are the source of intelligence. If it seems certain that the province is in a bad state, satrap No. 1 is recalled, and satrap No. 2 sent out in his stead. In civilized countries the process is different. You erect a bureau in the provinces you want to govern; you make it write letters and copy letters; it sends home eight reports per diem to the head bureau in St. Petersburg. Nobody does a sum in the province without someone doing the same sum in the capital to check him and see that he does it correctly. The consequence of this is, to throw on the heads of departments an amount of reading and labour which can only be accomplished by the greatest natural aptitude, the most efficient training, the most firm and regular industry."

Like the Indian society, Indian administration has an uninterrupted continuity and is the blending of the old and the new.

It has passed through all phases—Kshatrapas, subedars, fauzdars; the representative officer of administrative absolutism in the days of Akbar; the Platonic guardians of Mr. Woodruff. It has also one of the most modern structures transacting governmental business like any other great governments of the modern world.

If Administration in India is as old as the Indian Civilisation, what is new, is democracy. Indian monarchism, administrative absolutism under British rule and Indian democracy of today, radically different they are in many respects, have in reality much the same business to look to. We may rid ourselves of the misconception that administration stands upon an essentially different basis in a democratic state from that on which it stands in a non-democratic state. So far as administrative functions are concerned all governments have a strong structural likeness.

India's democratic state has yet to be equipped for carrying out the enormous burden of administration which the needs of an industrial and welfare state are so fast accumulating. There is enough material, experience and tradition to shoulder the burden. We should not blindly borrow and copy foreign systems which may be quite incompatible with the developing forms of Indian democracy.

As a nation we are somewhat crude as democrats and in our practise of democratic forms. We should steadfastly hold to the principle that democracy determines by debate all essential questions affecting the public weal. Next we must recognise that, in governing democratically, there is distinction between administration and politics. Thirdly, honest and clean democratic politics alone will sustain an incorruptible administration. Fourthly, if democracy weakens, you revert to a bureaucratic state.

Politicians should take heed of the fact that mere unschooled genius for affairs will not save them from sad blunders in administration. They must have knowledge of the art of governing. You do not govern just because you occupy the seat of authority. The fact must be accepted that bureaucracy has come to stay—it is a necessary element in a democracy in the modern world. When we as a people become more adept in self-governing, we will learn to use administration as a means of putting our own politics into convenient practice and to manipulate what is democratically political into what is administratively possible.

We are now in the midst of a transitional stage which promises to be a long drawn out period in our national development. It seems certain that both the administration and the

Civil Service will have to take part for many years in the battle for the survival of democracy and the resolution of the social dilemma of our society.

One thing, however, is a certainty. The administering character of the Indian State will endure, whatever may be the futuristic wave of Indian politics. The massive permanency of that characteristic of the Indian State is a legacy of the 19th century to modern India. When India had not evolved, unlike the Mandirinate system of China, a body of permanent officialdom, there were frequent collapses of bureaucratic machinery. This was one of the main reasons for the short duration of great Empires, for the frequent revolts of outlying provinces resulting in break-away independent states. Even the highly centralised Moghul Empire did not escape this Indian fate. The British rectified this deficiency by injecting into the administrative system a strong dose of centralisation, buttressed by a hierarchy of permanent officialdom. Thereby the foundations of the administration coming down from the days of Chandra Gupta Maurya were strengthened and reinforced. The administering state, governed democratically is one of the principal pillars of India's unity.



